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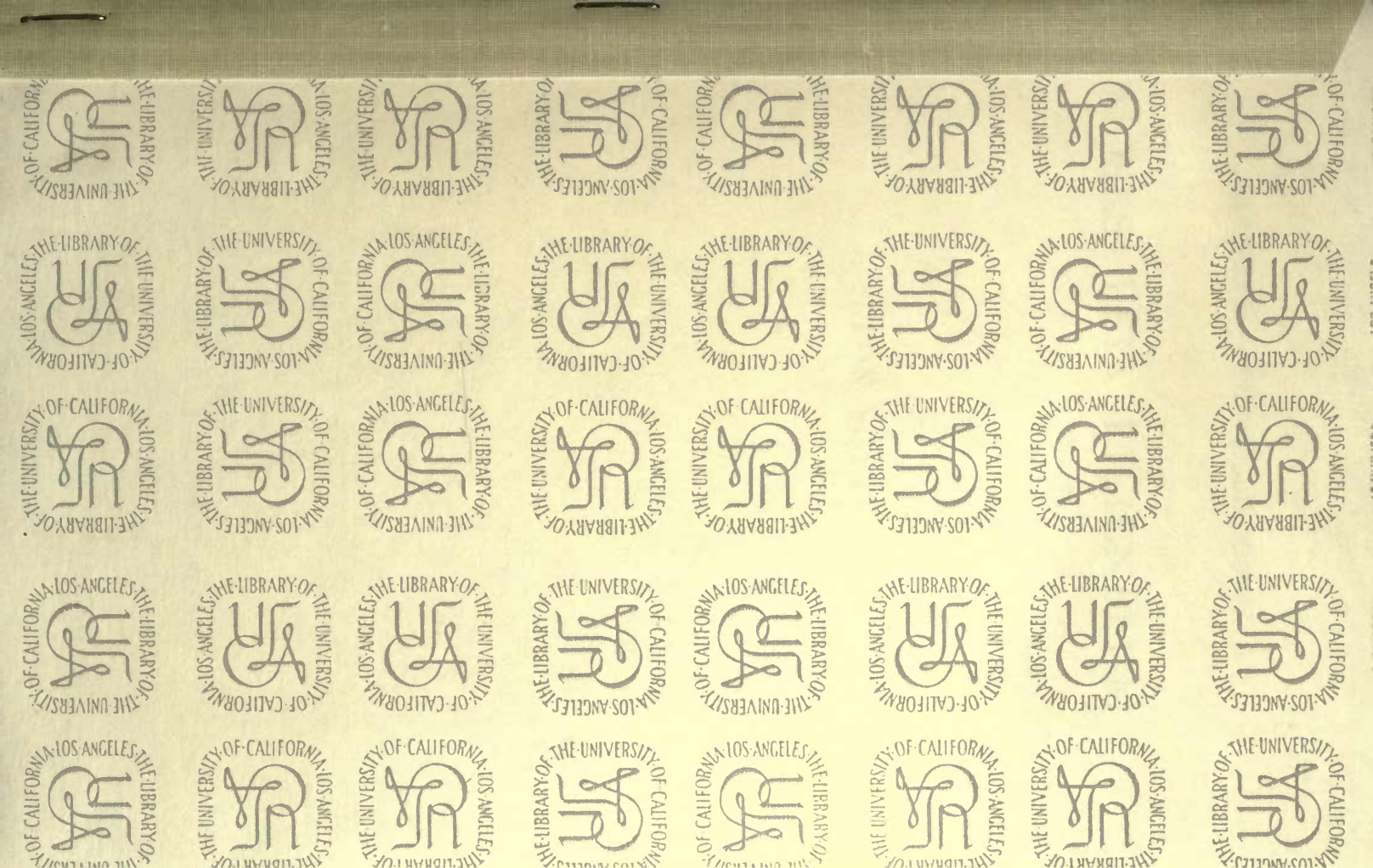
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MOSES LEIB LILIENBLUM

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BY

LEON SIMON

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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS essay, read before the Cambridge University Zionist Society, was written for the North London Jewish Literary Union. It does not purport to give an account, even in outline, of Lilienblum's work, either in the field of Hebrew literature or in that of Palestinian colonisation: it deals rather with what he was than with what he did. Lilienblum's personality is exceptionally interesting, whereas the fields in which he laboured are scarcely as yet within the ken of English Jews. Hence a frankly personal treatment of my subject seemed to be justified. The kind offer of the Cambridge Jewish Publication Committee to publish this little character-sketch leads me to hope that, imperfect as it is, it may not be without some general interest.

L. S.

LONDON.
March, 1912.

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MOSES LEIB LILIENBLUM

Moses Leib Lilienblum was born in the village of Kaidan, near Kovno, in the autumn of 1843. The surname by which he is known now did not belong to him from birth; for in his day and place registration of birth was a luxury rather than a necessity, and the Hebrew child was sufficiently designated by his own name and that of his father. It was not till many years later that Moses Leib ben Zewi found himself compelled to take a surname. He then wished to call himself Herrlichtsohn—a name which he had already used in print, having obtained it by a fanciful translation into German of "ben Zewi." But the book with which the name of Herrlichtsohn was associated had roused some feeling by its unorthodox views; and his friends accordingly persuaded him to avoid it. He then fixed on Lilienblum as the name that pleased him best.

His childhood gave no indication of the unorthodoxy which was afterwards to make his name a bye-word. His father was both pious and moderately learned; and it was his ambition that his son should become a Rabbi. Moses Leib showed every promise of fulfilling this fond hope. He had exceptional intellectual gifts, and withal a natural bent towards piety. He excelled in his studies—that is, of course, in the study of the Talmud—and bade fair to develop in the highest degree all the qualities necessary to a Rabbi. A boy of such promise was not likely long to remain single; for in those days learning and piety commanded a high price in the marriage-market. So at the early age of 13 Lilienblum was betrothed to a lady two years his junior; and two years later they were married. It was part of the arrangement that his parents-in-law, besides giving him the handsome

dowry of 300 roubles (some £30) with their daughter, should support him for six years; and he therefore removed to Vilkomir, where they lived, and took up his residence with them in the summer of 1859.

His marriage did not seriously affect his way of life. He went on with his studies, and, having finished the Talmud at the age of eighteen, began it over again. But his mental horizon became gradually wider. From time to time there came within his reach Hebrew books which were outside the regular curriculum, and breathed an atmosphere somewhat different from that which prevailed at Vilkomir. Now it would be a work of some medieval Rabbi of slightly original views; now a volume of the Hebrew paper "Hamaggid"—one of the fruits of the Hebrew revival which was even then beginning to act as a powerful solvent of the traditional Jewish way of life and thought. All this did not amount to very much: for Lilienblum was conservative by nature, and pious to a degree; and in his fear of heresy he would not even allow himself to read the *Moreh Nebuchim* of Maimonides. But gradually, almost imperceptibly, a change was coming over his outlook. By a slow and laborious process new ideas were winning their way into his mind, and destroying the harmony which had previously existed between himself and his surroundings. It was apparently over the question of belief in charms and evil spirits that the trouble first arose. To the young Lilienblum superstitions of this kind had been a part of his Judaism, to be accepted as unquestioningly as the revelation at Sinai; and he fought sturdily against the beginnings of doubt. But when he found that there was respectable authority in Hebrew literature for the rejection of these beliefs, he no longer hesitated to cast them off; and so the first outpost of his orthodox stronghold was lost. Meanwhile he was getting more and more into touch with the products of the *Haskalah*—the movement for the spread of western culture among the Jews of Russia—and he made some attempts at poetry in the style then in vogue. The first of his poems to be published appeared in 1866. At about the same time he started a society for the study of

Haskalah literature—that is to say, Hebrew books which were not within the orthodox canon. He was still himself what we should consider thoroughly orthodox: it had never occurred to him to doubt the literal inspiration of the Bible, and though he had by now ceased to regard the Talmud as divinely inspired, he still looked on it with veneration. But the standard of orthodoxy at Vilkomir was different. His avowed interest in the *Haskalah* literature made him suspect, and brought him a sharp reproof from the local Rabbi. Worse than that, it brought to a head his differences with his pious mother-in-law, who had long viewed with misgiving his falling away from the faith, and who had a sharp temper and a glib tongue. He was now thrown back more than ever on himself, and he began to take a closer and more comprehensive view of the causes of his estrangement from the orthodox. It became clear to him that the point at issue between them was not merely whether certain superstitions were or were not to be believed in. The difference lay much deeper than that: it lay in their divergent views of Jewish history, and in particular of the place of the Talmud in that history. To Lilienblum as to his opponents the Talmud was practically a sacred book. But for them its sacredness meant that every word in it must be true, and that every precept in it must be observed for all time, and made the foundation of other precepts which would encompass the life of the Jew in a chain of regulations growing ever more rigorous and complicated. For Lilienblum the value of the Talmud lay in its having developed out of the Bible a system of life which was suited to the needs of the age in which it grew up. The Rabbis of the Talmud were not, in his view, harsh legalists, whose only pleasure was to make the yoke of the Law as heavy as possible; they were reformers of the true type—reformers, that is, who strove to adapt the Law to life, and thereby to endow the Law itself with life and the power of healthy growth. Had their successors understood their principles, and followed in their footsteps, they would not have placed the seal of eternal holiness on every chance saying and every temporary precept; they in their day would

have changed and adapted, clothing the principles of Judaism in such a vestment of laws and regulations as would have satisfied the demands of life. But in fact the process had been very different. A rule made to meet particular circumstances had been continued in force as though it had permanent validity; and superstitious beliefs and practices had remained sacred in spite of advancing enlightenment. The result was that the Jewish people was labouring under an unbearable load, unable to move with the times, unable to live in the world; and orthodox Jews could not distinguish between an attempt to remove some vicious overgrowth and an attack on the foundations of Judaism. Hence it was that a man like Lilienblum, with all his learning and his piety, with all his firm belief in the divine source of the Jewish Law, could be branded as a heretic and an enemy because he tried to taste the fruits of modern thought.

This view of the Talmud, which had been suggested to him by a book of Isaac Bär Levinsohn, Lilienblum worked out in his אורחות התלמוד, published in *Hamelitz* in 1868. This pamphlet is in form an appeal to the Rabbis of his day to take account of modern thought, which was gaining a foothold among the Jews in spite of them, and must lead to apostasy unless they introduced such reforms as would enable a Jew to remain true to his religion without thereby shutting himself off from the world. The appeal is made with warmth, and the remedy is suggested with a genuine conviction which is somewhat pathetic. For it is but too clear—and Lilienblum himself soon came to see this—that the modern Jew cannot be saved for Judaism by the mere abrogation of such portions of the *Shulchan Aruch* as are incompatible with modern life, and have no real basis in the Torah. Pathetic, too, is the idea running through the pamphlet that the Russian Government would welcome the spread of enlightenment among the Jews—an idea based on hopes of a liberal policy which were soon to be dashed to the ground. And even if these notions about the modern Jew and about the Russian Government had been sound, Lilienblum's appeal would still have been wasted: for the

Rabbis were not to be stirred into reversing the policy of generations by the warnings of a young man already branded as an *Epikouros*. But the value of the ארחות התלמוד in no way depends on the prospects of success which it had. It is valuable because it enunciates, probably for the first time in Hebrew literature, the view of Judaism as a historical growth, in contradistinction to the view that Judaism is a petrified system, serenely indifferent to all possible changes in the conditions of life and ways of thinking of the outside world. This latter view would probably not be adopted, in so many words, by any orthodox Jew of modern times; but it none the less underlies many of the struggles of orthodoxy against a type of reform which is based on equally false premises. Reform of the German type, which starts by discarding the Talmud altogether, fails to recognise the principle of historic continuity no less than the stubborn orthodoxy which invests the Talmud with a divine right to dominate Jewish life till the end of time. That divine right Lilienblum would not concede; but in robbing the Talmud of its halo he enabled himself to defend it (against critics like McColl, whose "Old Paths" he had read in Hebrew) as a mighty landmark in the historical progress of Judaism, as a guide and an inspiration to all who desire a reform which means life and not death. His pamphlet is in fact a triumphant vindication of the Talmud. It is probable that he overstates his case, and exaggerates the extent to which Talmudic prescriptions were intended to be only of temporary validity. And there is no doubt—to my mind at least—that had his development been allowed to proceed on the lines which it had followed hitherto he would have had to apply the same point of view to the Bible itself. But it is indisputable that he laid down the lines which any real reform of Judaism must follow; and for that reason his ארחות התלמוד has very great value and has had a very real influence. We can scarcely blame him for not having seen then what is so clear now—that Judaism can only be completely reconciled with life when the Jews have again a life of their own.

The suspicion of unorthodoxy which had attached to Lilienblum before he published the ארחות התלמוד was turned into certainty by its publication; and when he replied to his critics in a still more outspoken supplement, he became the centre of a veritable storm. Had he denied every principle and violated every precept of the Judaism in the interests of which he wrote, he could scarcely have received worse treatment at the hands of the orthodox community of Vilkomir. Women and children called him names and pelted him with stones when he walked abroad; the men shunned him and refused to count him to *minyan*; his pupils (for by this time he had started to earn his living as a teacher) were taken away from him; his wife, who baked bread, lost her customers; his father-in-law and his father suffered similarly. To Lilienblum all this mattered little. He had no lack of courage; and he was not to be driven by threats or persecution into recanting opinions of the truth of which he was convinced. But he might have suffered more serious things, for it is said that the local community contemplated handing him over to the Governor of the district for condign punishment as an enemy of Judaism. His book, however, had made him friends as well as enemies. The *Maskilim* of Kovno and of Odessa welcomed him as a new recruit to the cause, and were sufficiently influential to save him from the fate which threatened him. So he was left unmolested, except for the petty persecutions which I have mentioned.

But clearly life had become impossible for him at Vilkomir. For all his fervent love of Judaism and his scrupulous observance of its commandments, he had put himself definitely outside the pale of orthodoxy, and he could no longer be at home in the atmosphere of a small Jewish village. Hence, when his new friends in Odessa offered to find him a livelihood there, he could not but grasp at the chance. Yet he hesitated for some time, and he might never have gone had he not been able to persuade himself that what made him desire to stay was really another reason for going. One tie there was that bound him to

Vilkomir—a tie of a nature that seems oddly out of keeping with his life-story as we have seen it so far. For into this dull and sapless life of the book-worm Talmudist of six-and-twenty, with a wife and children, there entered, during the enforced isolation which followed on the development of his heretical views, a real romance. By some chance he was thrown into contact with a girl whose identity he conceals under the initials F. N. She appears to have been exceptionally intelligent and cultivated; and she sympathised with him in his struggle against fanaticism. They spent much time together in study and discussion; together they read those idyllic Hebrew novels of Mapu which fell like a ray of sunshine across the drab life of many a Yeshibah student. It is small wonder that Lilienblum lost his heart to her—small wonder, and small blame: for intellectually he had nothing at all in common with his wife, who had been thrust on him at an absurdly early age. But it is small wonder also that when the prospect of moving to Odessa was held out to him his first thought was that he would be losing, perhaps for ever, his one happiness. Then came another idea. He would go to Odessa, study at a university, and become a man; his wife would gladly be rid of a husband who had discarded his beard; and then.... We may smile at this extraordinary piece of naïveté; but we shall do well to withhold any harsher judgement. Romantic folly is the young man's privilege; and in Lilienblum's case the folly went no further than this desperate mental clutching at a straw of hope. From Odessa he used to write to F. N.; but he never wavered in the fulfilment of his obligations to his wife and children, and often pinched himself to send them money.

For to Odessa he went alone, on the 3rd October, 1870. His family did not even know of his intention to go there until he had arrived. They would not have let him go alone: and it was useless to take them with him. Though he could not foresee the extent to which his way of life and thought would change at Odessa, he knew that some change there must be; and he could adapt himself to the new

circumstances much better if he were alone. Besides, he had no certain prospect of a living, in spite of the promises of his friends; and a family would have been an unbearable encumbrance. In fact, Lilienblum found life anything but easy in Odessa. He had nothing to fall back on but Hebrew teaching, an occupation as onerous as it was ill-paid. His dreams of entering a university vanished into thin air, and it was all that he could do to earn a bare living. Early in 1872 his wife and children joined him, and the struggle became still harder. He acted intermittently as teacher, as editor of a Yiddish paper, as clerk, as proof-reader, without ever really getting his head above water. From the material point of view his removal from Vilkomir to Odessa was not a success.

But we may turn from these sordid details to his inner history during these first years at Odessa.

He found himself suddenly plunged into a world in which the problems which had racked his brain for years were of no account whatever. How could you talk of reforming Judaism to men who unthinkingly cast off every obligation that Judaism imposed? Religious observance was at a discount in Odessa; and Lilienblum soon found that those minor relaxations for which he had pleaded were as nothing compared to the complete freedom which the Odessa Jew could win for himself without troubling about Rabbinic sanction. At first this utter indifference shocked and disgusted him. He remained himself scrupulously observant; and he continued the war of words which his אורחות התלמוד had aroused. But meanwhile he was coming under other influences. Abraham Krochmal tried to convince him that the literal inspiration of the Torah was a myth. For eight months Lilienblum struggled with himself over this question, and at the end of this period of agony he accepted the critical position. The result can best be described in his own words. "All the treasure," he writes, "that was stored up in my brain, all the wealth that I had gathered in my mind during my life—all was captured in a single moment... Theology was lost to me; literature, which with us is purely

theological and not practical, became contemptible; the question of uniting religion and life, on which I had worked so hard and for which I had suffered so much, became a question without meaning. I was like a philosopher who has lost his system, or a business house whose ledgers have been burnt...I found myself deserted, alone in the world... I took the last theoretical step and found dismay, emptiness of mind and confusion of soul." This is what it meant for Lilienblum to become a real *epikouros*. He cast off his religious beliefs and their practical consequences not as one who gets rid of an irksome burden, but as one who is forced to part with that which he values most in life. But for all the agony, it had to be done. If the Torah was not revealed at Sinai, then the whole fabric of Judaism fell to the ground: to Lilienblum that was the simplest and most incontrovertible logic. And he had the courage of his opinions, whether the price to be paid was persecution by other men or the loss of his mental peace.

For Lilienblum theory must be followed by practice; and this change in his mental outlook had the profoundest effect on his life. Henceforth—for a time at least—religious questions could have no interest for him, seeing that the very foundations of religious belief had been cut away. But the void had to be filled somehow; and the revulsion from a purely spiritual conception of life was so thorough that he was ready to replace it by a materialistic conception. He came under the influence of the utilitarian philosophy which was in vogue in Russia at that time. His bent had always been practical: he had written and fought with the object of getting certain things done. And now only those things were practical which tended to the material welfare of the individual or of society. For the Jews what was necessary was a solid material basis; and for himself it was more important to gain a firm foothold in the world than to fight the obscurantist Rabbis. He would no longer be a Don Quixote battling with windmills.

If we remember that our materialist was a man who apparently had no chance of realising his new practical

ambitions—a man, therefore, whose life seemed to himself foredoomed to failure and uselessness—we shall understand the frame of mind in which Lilienblum wrote his חטאת נעורים, "The Sins of Youth." This book, written in 1873, and published in 1876 under a pseudonym, is an autobiography, in which names are disguised, but the events of his life are narrated, and his mental condition at different times is depicted, in the most minute detail. Here again his purpose was a practical one: it was to make himself an object-lesson to others, to show them how not to live. For in his present frame of mind the whole of his past life seemed a gigantic mistake. That devotion to religion, that poring over the Talmud, were simply vanity and vexation of spirit. They served no practical end; on the contrary, they produced men who were of no possible use to society. In his own case they had produced a man who at last found himself within reach of life, only to realise that his early training had made him incapable of seizing the boon. So he depicts the life of the Jewish village with merciless irony and with equally merciless objectivity, neither excusing himself nor condemning others, but producing a terrible picture of narrowness and waste of life. The temper in which he wrote may be best illustrated by a couple of quotations. The first is his general characterisation of his life up to the time at which he was writing:

"I have passed through four periods: first, the period of chaos, when I lived in my native town, and was a lump of matter that might receive any form; secondly, the period of darkness and the beginning of the transition, from the time when I went to Marshalov [that is, Vilkomir] to live with my father-in-law, and stuffed myself with the most abject nonsense; when the world got so dark for me that at last the awful darkness began to move of its own weight; thirdly, the period of heresy, when I thought that I had found the truth, and fought for it as Don Quixote fought with the windmills, and believed myself happy in my fortune, which was no fortune at all; and fourthly, the period of crisis and despair, when I came to the city by the sea [that

is, Odessa], and saw a new world, such as I had not seen before either awake or asleep."

And here is his contrast between his own life and what he thinks life should be for a young man:

"My youth has gone, and as I write now I am thirty years old (less two months and some days), and the father of four children, three alive and one dead. But how did I spend my youth? I had no sport or enjoyment; my father and my cruel teachers made me sit shut up all day in the *Cheder*, nodding over the *Gemara*; I turned night into day in my efforts to finish the appointed task of study, though naturally this devotion cost me much in physical strength. In the normal course of things, a lad of sixteen who has brains, and has sensible parents, studies at a high school, and waits for two or three years to pass until he shall enter a university, or finish his studies in a commercial or technical school. He gives more than half the day to learning, and the rest to walking, playing, and other pastimes that fill up a young life. At twenty or later he may enjoy the sweets of love, which, though it generally means in the end some years of severe pain, yet gives him a taste of infinite joy before the disappointment comes: for he sees his beloved, he holds her hand, or plays with her hair; her eyes inflame his heart, her voice quickens his spirit, her lips meet his; and this lofty spiritual pleasure is worth the years of sweet pain that follow. Then when he becomes a man, and goes out into the world of action, he may often find obstacles in his path, but at least he is a man among men, respected by himself and others, *living* in the fullest sense of the word, rejoicing in the society of other men and of his family; and the memory of past days gives him no disquiet, but only satisfaction, as old memories always do that have something pleasant in them. But I—what am I? What has my life been, and what is it now? When I was sixteen I was tied to a wife without any thought or consideration, or any inclination for marriage; I lived in an atmosphere of death, walled up in the narrow boundaries of a fusty legal code; I had nothing to do with the world and all its joys; life for

me was nothing but the ineptitudes committed to writing by men whose bones had long since rotted away. Who can give me back now the days of my youth, which were wasted in idle dreams, and gave me no more pleasure than a deaf man can have of music? Who can give me back now my bodily and mental strength, and the peace of mind of my early days, when I could have made my way in the world by acquiring such knowledge as brings men wealth and honour? And how bitter it is for a man like myself, in the middle of his life, to despair of ever knowing anything of the world and its joys, realising as he does that his abilities have gone to waste, and that his few remaining decades will pass in toil and trouble, and can never see happiness, because it is too late for him to do any good for himself in the world which is real—that is, in this world! If I were looking forward to a transmigration, or to a future world, I might find consolation for the waste of this life; but now, when my *only* world is lost, who can compensate me for it?"

It is difficult to imagine a more complete transformation than that of the pious student and dreamer who wrote ארחות התלמוד into the materialistic pessimist of the חטאת נעורים. And yet the one character was as much Lilienblum's as the other. He was, as he himself says over and over again, very conservative by nature; but at the same time his mind was open to the influence of new ideas. Also, he was above all things a man whose conduct must square with his principles. His conservatism made him very slow to throw off orthodoxy; but when he did throw it off his logical consistency compelled him to discard with it the ideal of life which orthodoxy represented. The current utilitarian philosophy, coming on him when he had abandoned his old ideal, found an empty citadel, and promptly took possession. To put it paradoxically, materialism became for Lilienblum an ideal. Had he become a rich man, this materialistic phase might just conceivably have become permanent: in other words, he might have become a real and not an ideal materialist. But as things were he was in no danger of

sinking to that level. He remained a man of principle, though for the time being his principle was a wrong one.

From the purely literary point of view חטאת נעורים may be pronounced, without exaggeration, a masterpiece. Trivial as are the events which it describes, they are presented with such vividness, and in a style so simple and forcible, that they enthrall the reader's attention, and make him feel almost a personal interest in the drama which is enacted before him. The book has all the fascination of a novel, with the added advantage that its story is true. Especially admirable is the portrait of Lilienblum's mother-in-law, though it suffers perhaps from exaggeration. She is represented as a masterful woman, whose husband is a cypher in his own house. She combines piety and a genuine reverence for learning with exceptional shrewdness and unscrupulousness in practical affairs. Lilienblum, whose life she had embittered, was scarcely likely to describe her character with perfect fairness; but he has certainly produced a picture remarkably lifelike and clear of outline.

That Lilienblum, in spite of his poverty and his materialistic frame of mind, had not really lost his intense Jewish feeling is proved by an incident that occurred in 1876, the year in which חטאת נעורים was published. A report appeared in the newspapers that Haim Gedaliah, a wealthy Jew, had a plan for buying Palestine from the Sultan. This idea appealed very strongly to Lilienblum; and he published an article in which he severely criticised another writer who had raised objections on the score of the difficulty that there would be in observing the laws of offerings and tithes if the Jews were again established in Palestine. Lilienblum, with his practical common sense, saw that such questions must be left to settle themselves after the return to Palestine had become an accomplished fact. But of course Gedaliah's scheme came to nothing, and Lilienblum was thrown back for a time on his more selfish ideals.

For all the pessimism that runs through חטאת נעורים, he had by no means abandoned the hope of entering a university and making himself a useful member of society. But he

found study impossible so long as his wife and family were with him; and he had to wait for an opportunity of sending them back to Vilkomir. This opportunity came with the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war in 1877, which created some panic among the inhabitants of Odessa, and made many of them remove their families to a safe distance inland. Lilienblum took his wife and children to Vilkomir, and returned to Odessa alone. Then at last he set himself seriously to secular study, with the aid of *Gymnasium* students whom he taught Hebrew. He had to begin right at the beginning, to become a boy again at thirty-four. Latin, French, Russian, arithmetic and geography were the subjects into which he threw himself with youthful ardour. His day's work of learning and teaching covered something like eighteen hours. But he was happy in the thought that at last he was advancing towards the right goal. His wife wanted to return to him, but he was inexorable. In August, 1877, he writes her a long letter in which he explains that from the very first his intention had been to become a student, and expresses his determination to carry through what he has now begun. "I must complete some course of study"—this phrase runs like a refrain through the letter. And to his lady friend F. N. he writes with almost childish pleasure of the progress that he is making. Here is an amusing extract from one of his letters:

"May all the angels preserve you, my friend, from hearing a man repeat his geography lesson! If you don't believe me, I will let loose on you a flood of names which, if I heard anybody else repeat them, I should take for a charm or magic spell. But I would not deceive you for worlds; and so I tell you the plain truth—that I am now repeating my geography lesson aloud. And do you please take the book of so-and-so and open at page so-and-so, and listen, and correct me if I go wrong. Now attend:

"Celebrated Peninsulas: In Europe: Scandinavia, Jutland" —and so on. After finishing with the peninsulas he goes on to the capes, of which he names nearly thirty, and then at the end: "Forgive me, my friend, if I tell you that you

haven't done your work properly. I said *Frodwar* instead of *Froward*, and you didn't correct me."

The necessity of earning a living must have been a severe handicap to Lilienblum in his studies. Yet he characteristically refused an offer of support because it was accompanied by a condition which he did not like. Towards the end of 1878 Baron Ginzburg offered, through Leon Gordon, to make him an allowance of 25*s.* a month so long as he studied, on condition that after passing through a *Gymnasium* he would devote himself to Oriental studies. But Lilienblum replied that in his opinion natural science was the highest study, because he was primarily a man, and belonged to any narrower category—such as that of Jew—only by accident or convention! He could not bind himself to take up a subject which had but a secondary claim on his attention. This is a very good illustration of the form that his materialism took. The solid material world of natural science was of much more importance to him than the abstractions of history; and he was willing to forgo a material advantage in order that he might be free to follow his materialistic bent.

So Lilienblum declined the Baron's offer, and stuck to his Hebrew teaching while he fought his way into the inner mysteries of Latin and geography. This course of life continued for a period of four years, about which we learn from a book published some years later, under the title of דרך תשובה or "The Return," as a continuation of חטאת נעורים. "The Return" is simply a series of letters and extracts from his diary, with a brief introduction, but with no attempt at weaving together or comment. Thus we do not get, as in the earlier work, a criticism of the younger by the older Lilienblum. If we had such a criticism, it would be no less destructive in its turn than that which the poverty-stricken *melammed* of 1873 levelled against the Talmudic student of Vilkomir. For the "return" indicated by the title of the later book meant once more a complete change of outlook and ideal. It was not, indeed, a return to the standpoint of his youth: that had become impossible. But it meant the

abandonment once for all of the pursuit of western culture and his own material prosperity as an ideal, and the adoption of a line of action based on his sympathy with his own people and his desire to solve their problems. What led immediately to this sudden change in his life was the outbreak of the terrible Russian persecutions of 1880—81. To Lilienblum, as to so many other Russian Jews of that time, it became clear that any hopes based on the apparent liberality of the Government were illusory; that the Jews were not to be allowed to Europeanise themselves and to become incorporated in a civilised and progressive Russian commonwealth. But he could not stop at this negative conclusion. Sternly logical as ever, he saw that the only hope for his people lay in their restoration to Palestine, where they could live their own life in their own way. This was the ideal for which in reality he had been waiting during the period of pessimism and materialism; and when once it was found he never afterwards wavered in his devotion to it.

This is how the terrible events of 1881 are reflected in his diary. He writes out a passage of Ovid with a Hebrew translation; then suddenly breaks off and adds this verse from Jeremiah: "Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things? Seek them not!"

That is to say, while these enormities were being inflicted on his people it was not for him to be striving after "great things"—satisfaction of his personal ambition for Western culture and life. Latin and geography had become useless and irrelevant; there was other work for a Jew to do. So we find it written in his diary: "In September (1881) I abandoned my *Gymnasium* studies." And from that time onward he threw himself heart and soul into the new movement for colonising Palestine, the movement known as *Chibbath Zion*.

Lilienblum's entry into this third and last phase marks both the end and the beginning of his life. It was the end of the uncertain groping after an ideal that could satisfy

him; it was the beginning of a period of settled convictions and fruitful activity. And as a romance is wont to end at the point where the hero and heroine have overcome the obstacles that stood in the way of their happiness, and settled down to the real unromantic business of life, so a biographer of Lilienblum may be pardoned for expatiating on his thirty-eight years of storm and stress and struggle, and passing lightly over his last thirty years of settled work. He served the new movement first as honorary and afterwards as paid secretary. He was the right-hand man of Dr Puisker, the first leader of the *Choveve Zion*. All who wanted to go to Palestine turned to him for advice and help; and as Odessa was on the high-road to Palestine, he came into personal contact with a large number of colonists. In later years he published an account of the early history of the movement under the title דרך לעבור גולים, "The Return of the Exiles." We gather from this book an idea of the minute attention which he paid to his work, and the enormous satisfaction which he derived from seeing his ideal actually taking concrete shape before his eyes. During all this time he was actively preaching as well as working for the idea. He wrote articles in Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish, advocating the settlement of Jewish colonists in Palestine. He used all three languages because he saw that it was necessary to enlist the sympathies of all sections of Jews—of the intellectuals who read Hebrew, of the assimilated who read Russian, and of the masses whose language was Yiddish. He started at first with the idea that Palestine could be purchased outright from the Sultan; but he soon came to see that this was a visionary scheme, and that the only sound policy was one of gradual infiltration. But the same practical instinct that set him right on this point made him incapable of seeing that anything mattered except to get the largest possible number of Jews settled in the land. In 1889, when Achad-Ha'am startled the *Choveve Zion* by pointing out to them that the colonisation of Palestine was not proceeding on the right lines, because they were attracting people by illusory hopes of material advantage,

instead of fostering and relying on the national sentiment, his ideas found no severer critic than Lilienblum. For if the settlement of Jews in Palestine were necessary—so Lilienblum reasoned—then surely the proper thing must be to get Jews by all possible means to go to Palestine. Why trouble about the reasons for which they went, or even about what they did when they got there? One Jew more in Palestine meant one step nearer the goal. So Lilienblum remained a *practical* Zionist in the strictest and narrowest sense.

Lilienblum's Zionist activity continued uninterrupted till his death in March 1910. To describe it in detail would be to write the history of the Jewish national movement, with every phase of which (including the new Zionism created by Herzl) he was associated. It is sufficient here to say that his splendid work in the national cause won its full meed of recognition, and that the name of Lilienblum to-day recalls to the Jew not the materialist of the 'sixties, but the true son of his people who never swerved from the path of loyal service when once he had found it. During the earlier years of his Zionist activity he had sometimes to contend with the opposition of those who considered that a heretic ought not to hold office in a Jewish movement; but he always retained, as he deserved, the confidence of the *Choveve Zion* as a whole. Even in his native village he was received with acclamation in 1889—a fact which testifies no less to the change which had come over Russian Jewry than to the value of Lilienblum's work.

Achad-Ha'am has compared Lilienblum to a force which can only move in one direction, and which, if it meets with an impenetrable obstacle, cannot swerve and continue at an angle, but must simply stop dead. Lilienblum's first efforts to reform Judaism brought him up against the solid wall of orthodox prejudice. Another man might have met the situation by changing his methods, and endeavouring to reach the same goal by another path. But for Lilienblum it was either his first line or none at all. The check led not to a change of method, but to a change of goal—to a fresh

start after a new ideal. Precisely the same thing happened later on, when the outbreak of persecution barred the way to European culture. At once European culture ceased to be an ideal, and its place was taken by *Chibbath Zion*. Thus it is that his spiritual progress presents the appearance of a succession of sudden stops and fresh beginnings, rather than of a gradual development. That this is so is not due to anything abnormal in that spiritual progress itself: for the advance from traditionalism through assimilation to Zionism is perfectly logical, and in many cases inevitable. Lilienblum made the journey in an exceptional way because his was an exceptional character in its combination of strong conservatism with freedom of thought and rigid logical consistency. He could not change his opinions by a process of grafting new conceptions on the old; for the old conception, so long as its roots remained, could only develop in one way. Change could only come about through the complete uprooting of the old point of view, and the planting of a new one in its place. And since the freedom of his thought and the play of circumstance made change inevitable, the history of his essentially conservative mind is a history of violent revolutions.

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